ST. LOUIS METRO NEWS

Is the St. Louis Metro Police Department Hiding a Drug Task Force?

By Ray Downs

Jun 24, 2014 at 12:22 pm

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St. Louis Metro Police/Facebook

The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department received $200,000 in grant funding for a drug task force that they say does not exist.

That might sound strange, but city officials tell Aaron Malin, a researcher for Show-Me Cannabis, the marijuana reform group, that they don't know about any so-called "drug task force." And that's despite several government records showing that grant money has been awarded to the non-existent drug task force and other records that tally the number of arrests the unit has made. These records were obtained by Malin via Missouri Sunshine requests.

Malin tells Daily RFT that he believes there can only be two explanations.

"They're deliberately misleading the public or worse, are genuinely ignorant," Malin says. "And that's more concerning because that means there's an armed task force running around St. Louis enforcing drug laws and, if history is any indication, in a manner that is somestimes violent."

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So is the SLMPD hiding a drug task force? That sounds strange, given that there's nothing inherently controversial about having such a unit.

The inquiry started last November when Malin was looking over the different drug task forces around the state and saw that there was a separate DTF for the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. Interested in what this DTF does, Malin sent a Sunshine request to the SLMPD.

Mark Lawson, the Attorney Manager for the SLMPD, responded, saying that he doesn't know of any such unit.

See also: *Missouri Drug Task Forces Seize a Lot of Money and Don't Keep Close Records Of Where it Goes*

"The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, whose jurisdiction extends over the City of St. Louis, does not have a 'St. Louis Metro Drug Task Force,'" Lawson wrote, concluding that Malin might be confusing the City with the County, which certainly does have a drug task force.

What followed was a long and, for Malin, frustrating back-and-forth about whether or not the SLMPD has a drug task force.

Lawson wrote that he couldn't provide documentation of a thing that doesn't exist and that Police Chief Sam Dotson has never heard of any so-called "drug task force" in the SLMPD.

But it turns out that both Dotson and Lawson are named as principals on the SLMPD's drug task force, according to documents Malin acquired:

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Project Director

The Project Director is the individual that will have direct oversight of the proposed project. If the project agency is a law enforcement agency, the Project Director must be the Chief, Sheriff, or Director of Public Safety.

Name:*	Chief	Sam	Dotson
	Title	First Name	Last Name
Job Title:*	Chief of Police		
Agency:*	Saint Louis Metropolitan Police Department		

The Chief of Police, as Project Director, has 'direct oversight' over the drug task force.

Via additional Sunshine Law requests to the Missouri Department of Public Safety for documents **filed with DPS by the SLMPD Drug Task Force** I was able to obtain additional information on their organizational structure (in addition, obviously, to confirming that they aren't so non-existent after all). The 2013 Grant Details Report on the SLMPD Drug Task Force lists the Chief of Police as the Project Director of the task force, which gives him 'direct oversight over the proposed project."

Total Budget

Total Federal/State Share:	$128,507.19
Total Local Match Share:	$71,815.83
Total Project Cost:	$200,323.03

2013 Grant Details Reports obtained from MO Department of Public Safety.

But even better- guess who is listed on the very first page of the 2012 Grant Details Report as the "authorized official" legally responsible for accepting over $200k/year in funding for the task force? That's right- its Mr. Mark Lawson, the SLMPD lawyer with whom I'd been communicating all along.

Show-Me Cannabis

That's a lot of money to not know anything about. But there's more.

Below is an excerpt from a 2013 status report for the non-existent drug task force. It lists that the unit consists of 55 full-time police officers and most of its activity involves arresting people for drug possession, with the largest number of those arrests being for marijuana:

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